



How To Practice Mindful Parenting

Emma Zoloth, Psy.D.
Clinical Psychologist
Anxiety Disorders Center

Transforming Children's Lives



The Child Mind Institute is an independent, national nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders. Our teams work every day to [deliver the highest standards of care](#), [advance the science of the developing brain](#) and empower parents, professionals and policymakers to [support children when and where they need it most](#).

Agenda

- **Definition** of Mindfulness
- Benefits of **Mindful Parenting**
- Mindfulness Benefits for **Children**
- Mindfulness **“How To”** Skills
- Specific Age-Appropriate **Skills for Children and Teens**
- Tips for Implementing **Mindfulness in Your Home**
- Helpful **Resources**
- **Q & A**

Opening Mindfulness Exercise

What is Mindfulness?

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.”

- Jon Kabat-Zinn

What is Mindfulness?

"Mindfulness is allowing an emotion to take hold and pass without acting on it." -*Benedict Carey*

"Mindfulness is not hitting someone in the mouth." -*11 year old who completed a mindfulness training at his school, quoted in the New York Times*

What is Mindfulness?

- Living life with awareness of exactly **what is happening in the present moment**.
- Being aware of your present moment (thoughts, feelings, body sensations) **without judgment** and **without trying to change it**.
- Increasing your attentional control by **staying focused on one thing at a time**.

Your body is present.



Is your mind?



Myths About Mindfulness

Just a
Relaxation
Technique

Just About
Emptying Your
Mind

Too Simple

Too
Intimidating

Psychotherapy

Counter to My
Religious
Practice

You Have to
Be Good At
Sitting Still

Boring

Wastes Time

Just a Passing
Trend

Mindfulness vs. Meditation

Mindfulness – paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally

- Mindfulness can include any and all activities

Meditation – the act or process of spending time in quiet thought to promote relaxation, build energy, and develop compassion

- Transcendental Meditation – use of a Mantra or sound, 15-20 min/day, twice a day

Benefits of Mindfulness

- **Allows you to be in control of your mind** rather than letting your mind be in control of you
- Helps you **choose a behavior more thoughtfully**, rather than reacting impulsively
- Helps **focus your attention**
- Allows you to **see reality more accurately**, non-judgmentally
- Can reduce emotional suffering & **increase sense of well-being**
- Can increase **compassion for self and others**



How could mindfulness benefit your relationship with your child?

Benefits of Mindfulness for Children

- Felver et al. (2015) – Of the studies that were more rigorous in design, children who received a Mindfulness-Based intervention compared to controls showed:
 - **Reduced blood pressure, lower heart rate** (Barnes et al., 2008)
 - Teacher and parent reported **improved executive functioning** (Flook et al., 2010)
 - Teacher reported **improved attention, social skills**; and self-reported **reduced test anxiety** (Napoli et al., 2005)
 - Self-reported **reduction in suicidal ideation and affect disturbance** (Britton et al., 2014)
 - Self-reported **improved emotion regulation** (Metz et al., 2013)
- Kuyken et al. (2013) – Children who received mindfulness-based intervention compared to controls showed:
 - **Greater well-being**
 - **Lower stress**
 - **Fewer depressive symptoms**

Benefits of Mindfulness for Children

- Black & Fernando (2014) – Among lower-income and ethnic minority elementary school children, mindfulness training seems to **benefit teacher-based perceptions of improved classroom behavior**.
- Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015) – Elementary school children who received a social-emotional learning program that centers around mindfulness compared to controls showed improved:
 - **Cognitive control (response inhibition, flexibility, working memory)**
 - Self-report measures of **well-being**
 - Self- and peer-reported **prosocial behavior**
- Mindfulness was shown to mitigate the **effects of bullying** (Zhou, Liu, Niu, Sun, & Fan, 2016)

Mindfulness for Parents

Practicing mindfulness with your child has important positive outcomes for parents:

- Reduction in **general stress** and **parenting-specific stress**
- Improvements in **self-regulation in difficult parenting moments**
- Increased **nonjudgmental acceptance of self**
- Increased empathy and acceptance of child
- **More control** over reactions toward child

Mindfulness “How To” Skills

OBSERVE

- “Wordless watching”
- Don’t cling too tightly or push away
- Just notice
- Notice 5 senses, internal and external

DESCRIBE

- Label what you observe with words
- “I feel...”, “I’m having an urge to...”
- No interpretations allowed!

PARTICIPATE

- Throw yourself into the present moment fully
- Get “in the zone”
- When do you experience “flow?”

DON’T JUDGE ~ NONJUDGMENTALLY

- Stick to the facts using what you observe with your senses
- Catch and replace your judgments
- If you do judge, don’t judge yourself for doing so

STAY FOCUSED ~ ONE-MINDFULLY

- Focus your attention on one thing in the moment
- Slow down, concentrate your mind
- Refocus your attention when it drifts again and again

DO WHAT WORKS ~ EFFECTIVELY

- Stay focused on your goal and be as skillful as possible to achieve it
- Don’t let emotions control your behavior

Breathing: The Heart of Mindfulness

The foundation of all mindfulness practices is to bring your awareness to your breath.

- You breathe in and out about twenty thousand times a day.
- How many of those breaths are you consciously aware of?
- How many of those breaths do you really enjoy?



Mindfulness: How to Practice Mindful Breathing

- 1) **Create time and space** - regular time, quiet place
- 2) **Set a timer** - start with 3-5 minutes and build
- 3) **Comfortable sitting position** - chair, floor
- 4) **Check your body position** – posture, hand placement
- 5) **Take deep breaths** – can count to pace yourself
- 6) **Direct attention to the breath** – where you notice breath in your body
- 7) **Maintain attention to the breath** – return focus if attention wanders
- 8) **Repeat 6 and 7**
- 9) **Be kind to yourself** – your mind will wander, gently bring it back
- 10) **Prepare for a soft landing** – give yourself time to transition



From Infographic: 10 Steps to Mindfulness Meditation. Retrieved from <https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/blog/10-steps-to-mindfulness-meditation/>

Practical Strategies



- **Formal Practices** – body scan, sitting, walking, breathing
- **Informal Practices** – bringing mindful awareness to everyday activities, e.g. showering, eating, commuting, talking
- Use the **physical sensations** of breathing as the **anchor** for attention
- An **objective, non-judgmental stance** allows one to **witness** thoughts and emotions as transient
- This allows one to **recognize and disengage** from habitual patterns of mind, and begin to respond **reflectively**, rather than reactively

Mindfulness Exercise



Mindfulness Exercises

- Using **five senses** to experience the object
 - Touch, sound, sight, smell, taste
- **Observe** and **describe** instead of judging
- Stay in the **present** moment
- Acknowledge non-related thoughts and **let them go**
- Be **fully** in this present moment



Mindful Parenting

- Find **time for yourself** and pause to practice mindfulness once a day, even if only for 3 minutes.
- Find opportunities to practice mindfulness (in **formal practice** such as breath practice or body scan and **informal practice** in everyday activities such as showering, getting children dressed, eating).
- Schedule time to **just be** with your children with no agenda in mind.
- Practice seeing the world **through your child's eyes** and step into their experience.
- See **everyday moments** with your children as opportunities to connect, instead of waiting for the perfect moment. (e.g. walking to school, the going-to-bed routine, teeth brushing - instead of waiting for weekends, summer vacations, etc.).
- Learn to **pause** and become an **observer** of thoughts, emotions and body sensations and the messages they may be offering you.

Mindful Parenting

- Notice when you're not feeling centered. Give yourself permission to take time to **pause** and **reset**.
- Practice **compassion** when you're just not sure how to handle a situation.
- Check in with your body throughout the day. Are you holding any stress or tension? Practice **relaxation**.
- Practice **gratitude** - spend a few moments everyday reflecting on a pleasant moment you had with your children and/or something you appreciate about them.
- Remember to **breathe**.



Sample Mindfulness Exercises for Children Ages 3 - 7

***General Rule of Thumb: Children can usually practice mindfulness for one minute per their age in years**

- Mindful play (i.e., finger painting, water/sand table)
 - Guide them to focus on their senses
- “Spidey” senses (tuning into the 5 senses)
- Mindful blowing bubbles
- Mindful jar
- Mindful walk (“Safari”)
- Mindful poses
 - Superman, Wonder Woman



Sample Mindfulness Exercises for Children Ages 8 - 12

- Belly breaths
- Paced breathing
- Hand tracing
- Mindful eating
- Listening to music, sounds
- Mindful drawing, coloring
- Stretching, yoga
- Mindful games, such as Zip-zap-zop or Going on a picnic (for groups)



Sample Mindfulness Exercises for Teens

- Diaphragmatic breathing (belly breaths)
- Body scan exercise
- Last letter, first letter game
- Square breathing
- Mindful eating
- Gratitude practice, loving kindness
- Games (e.g. Jenga)
- Mindful walking
- Listening to a song mindfully



Tips for Implementing Mindfulness with Your Children

- **Establish your own practice** – if your kids recognize that mindfulness matters to you, they will be more likely to engage in this practice
- **Let go of expectations** – notice small shifts
- **Don't force it** – practice non-attachment to outcomes
- **Don't make mindfulness a punishment** – if possible, find consistent times to practice



Barriers to Integrating Mindfulness

- Abstract concept
- Requires first-hand knowledge, ongoing teaching and repetition
 - Practice, practice, practice
- Might be difficult
- Often no immediate benefit
 - Changes can be subtle
- Need to try different types of exercises
 - Some exercises might be aversive
- Rejection of mindfulness as 'religious' or 'new age'
- Needs to be incorporated as a lifestyle change

Online Resources on Mindfulness

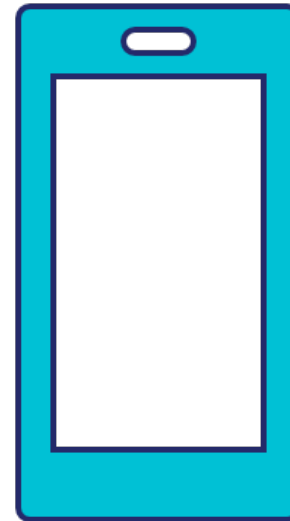
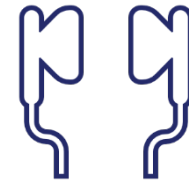
- American Mindfulness Research Association
- Center for Mindfulness at UMass Medical School
- Garrison Institute
- Mindfulness in Education
- www.mindful.org
- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center
- Room to Breathe (2012) – first professional documentary on mindfulness in education*
- Online videos – Class DOJO, GoNoodle, etc.
- Center for Healthy Minds at UW Madison
- Transforming Education – Mindfulness Toolkit
<https://www.transformingeducation.org/mindfulness-toolkit/>

Book Resources on Mindfulness

- Wherever You Go, There You Are by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005)
- Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2012)
- The Mindful Child: How to Help Your Kid Manage Stress and Become Happier, Kinder, and More Compassionate by Susan Kaiser Greenland (2010)
- Sitting Still Like a Frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents) by Eline Snel (2013)
- A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles by Thich Nhat Hanh (2008)
- Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children by Thich Nhat Hanh (2007)
- The Mindful Teen: Powerful Skills to Help You Handle Stress One Moment at a Time by Dzung Vo (2015)

Mindfulness Based Apps

- Stop Breathe Think
- Take a Break
- Smiling Mind
- Headspace
- Mindfulness for Children
- Thrive for Alexa: Amazon
- Take a Chill
- OMG I Can Meditate
- Insight Timer
- Breathe2Relax
- Positive Penguins
- Settle Your Glitter



“You can’t stop the waves,
But you can learn to surf.”

Thank you!

Questions?

childmind.org



CHILD MIND[®]
INSTITUTE

Transforming children's lives[®]

childmind.org